

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 0784

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, KS

SUBJECT: ROKG SETS REFERENDUM DATE; KIM YONG-SAM

HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: (A) SEOUL 622; (B) SEOUL 562; (C) SEOUL 521

BEGIN SUMMARY: ON FEBRUARY 5, ROKG ANNOUNCED THAT FEBRUARY 12 WILL BE DAY SCHEDULED FOR VOTING ON NATIONAL REFERENDUM AND THAT 12TH HAS ALSO BEEN PROCLAIMED AN OFFICIAL 1975 KOREAN HOLIDAY. KIM YONG-SAM IN HIS FEBRUARY 5 PRESS CONFERENCE RECONFIRMED THAT NDP WOULD BOYCOTT PROCEEDINGS AND WOULD NOT NOMINATE POLL WATCHERS. HE DID RECOMMEND, HOWEVER, THAT ALL PEOPLE REPORT PRELIMINARY AS WELL AS ELECTION IRREGULARITIES. CHURCH GROUPS ALSO DENOUNCING REFERENDUM AND PLANNING PROTEST MEETINGS. DESPITE THIS OPPOSITION ACTIVITY, ROKG CONTINUES TO REFRAIN FROM PUNITIVE ACTION AGAINST MAJOR OPPOSITION ELEMENTS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN ADDITION TO ANNOUNCING OFFICIAL VOTING DAY, ROKG STATE COUNCIL ALSO RELEASED SCHEDULE LEADING UP TO FEB 12TH REFERENDUM DATE AS FOLLOWS:

(A) ON FEB 7, FINAL LIST OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS WILL BE DETERMINED

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AND ANNOUNCED TO PUBLIC. ALSO, SAMPLE BALLOT CONTAINING ACTUAL

REFERENDUM QUESTION WILL BE AVAILABLE. (THIS WILL BE FIRST OFFICIAL RELEASE OF REFERENDUM QUESTION).

(B) ON FEBRUARY 8, ROKG WILL COMPLETE ITS OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION OF REFERENDUM TO ALL ELIGIBLE VOTERS BY MAIL.

(C) ON FEBRUARY 9, SELECTION OF OFFICIAL OBSERVERS WILL BE COMPLETED.

(D) ON FEB 9-10, ALL VOTERS WILL BE GIVEN TICKETS TO CARRY TO OFFICIAL POLLING PLACES ON FEB 12 TO EXCHANGE FOR OFFICIAL BALLOTS.

(3) ON FEB 11, ROKG WILL COMPLETE SETTING UP OF POLLING PLACES.

2. KIM YONG-SAM ROUTINELY SUMMARIZED PREVIOUS NDP ARGUMENTS AGAINST REFERENDUM IN PREDICTABLE, UNEVENTFUL PRESS CONFERENCE. KIM SAID HE WOULD ORGANIZE NATIONWIDE, NON-VIOLENT CAMPAIGN TO BOYCOTT REFERENDUM, ECHOING NDP SPOKESMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON PREVIOUS DAY THAT NDP HAD CAUCUSED AND APPROVED THIS ACTION (47 OUT OF 57 NDP ASSEMBLYMEN WERE PRESENT.)

3. AFTER CALLING PRESIDENT PARK TO TASK FOR REFUSING TO MEET WITH HIM, KIM STATED PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE REAL CHOICE BETWEEN CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND YUSHIN. IN ANY CASE, REFERENDUM IS ILLEGAL SINCE ARTICLE 49 OF CONSTITUTION UNDER WHICH IT IS BEING HELD, DOES NOT PROVIDE FOR VOTING ON GENERAL POLICIES OR ON THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF. KIM SAID ENCOURAGING BOYCOTT OF REFERENDUM, LIKE URGING PARTICIPATION, IS NO CRIME. HE ASKED PUBLIC NOT TO TOLERATE ANY VOTING OR OTHER IRREGULARITIES AND TO REPORT THEM TO NDP OFFICES.

4. APART FROM NDP POSITION, RELIGIOUS GROUPS ARE INCREASINGLY SPEAKING OUT AGAINST REFERENDUM. CHURCHES AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL COUNCIL AND CATHOLIC GROUPS HAVE ALREADY DENOUNCED REFERENDUM. NATIONAL COUNCIL ISSUED STATEMENT FEB 5 CALLING REFERENDUM UNCONSTITUTIONAL. CATHOLIC GROUPS PLANNING PROTEST MASS AT MYONGDONG CATHEDRAL FEBRUARY 6. PROTESTANTS WILL HOLD RALLY ON FEBRUARY 8.

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5. DESPITE INCREASE IN OPPOSITION ACTIVITY, GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO REFRAIN FROM PUNITIVE ACTION AGAINST PARTICIPANTS. THREE ARRESTS MENTIONED REF (A) ARE STILL ONLY ONES WE HAVE HEARD OF TO DATE. BLUE HOUSE STAFF MEMBERS CONTINUE TO ASSURE US GOVERNMENT WILL BEND OVER BACKWARDS TO AVOID GIVING AMMUNITION TO THE OPPOSITION BY ENGAGING IN OVERLY REPRESSIVE MOVES. NDP MEMBERS, WHILE ADMITTING THAT THEY WOULD FIND IT USEFUL TO HAVE SOME OPPOSITION MEMBERS "SACRIFICED" FOR THE SAKE OF MAKING THE

GOVERNMENT APPEAR BLATANTLY REPRESSIVE, HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY, TOO, DOUBT THE GOVERNMENT WILL MOVE AGGRESSIVELY AGAINST THEM, AT LEAST PRIOR TO THE REFERENDUM VOTE.

COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE NDP AND THE OTHER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS HAVE TAKEN A FIRM PRO-BOYCOTT STAND ON THE REFERENDU, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THEY HAVE THE FINANCES, ORGANIZATION, OR RESOLVE TO MOUNT A BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN WHICH WILL PUT MUCH OF A DENT IN THE VOTE TURN-OUT IN THE WEEK REMAINING BEFORE FEBRUARY 12. FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S STANDPOINT, THE GREATER PROBLEM IN THIS REGARD IS THE REPORTEDLY WIDESPREAD VOTER APATHY RESULTING IN GREAT MEASURE FROM FAILURE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE VOTE IS ALL ABOUT. THIS PROBLEM IS NOT INSOLUBLE, HOWEVER, GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT'S PAST EXPERIENCE WITH TURNING OUT THE VOTERS, SPARTICULARLY IN THE RURAL AREAS.
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